

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY**

RONALD BURTON,	:	
	:	Civil Action No. 08-0312 (FSH)
Plaintiff,	:	
	:	
v.	:	OPINION
	:	
HUDSON COUNTY CORRECTION	:	
CENTER,	:	
	:	
Defendant.	:	

APPEARANCES:

Plaintiff pro se
Ronald Burton
Hudson County Correctional Center
35 Hackensack Avenue
Kearny, NJ 07032

HOCHBERG, District Judge

Plaintiff Ronald Burton, a prisoner confined at Hudson County Correctional Center in Kearny, New Jersey, seeks to bring this action in forma pauperis pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, alleging violations of his constitutional rights. Based on his affidavit of indigence¹ and the absence of three qualifying dismissals within 28 U.S.C. §1915(g), the Court will grant

¹ Although Plaintiff did not attach the required six-month institutional account statement to his application for leave to proceed in forma pauperis, he did attach the required account statement to another civil complaint submitted contemporaneously, and this Court will rely on that account statement. See Burton v. Project Renewal, Civil Action No. 08-0311 (SRC).

Plaintiff's application to proceed in forma pauperis pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a) and order the Clerk of the Court to file the Complaint.

At this time, the Court must review the Complaint to determine whether it should be dismissed as frivolous or malicious, for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or because it seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief.

I. BACKGROUND

The following factual allegations are taken from Plaintiff's Complaint and are accepted as true for purposes of this review.

Plaintiff alleges that he has been confined with three other inmates in a two-man cell. In addition, he contends that he was denied a clean sheet for a period of approximately two months. The Court construes these allegations as an attempt to state a claim that Plaintiff has been subjected to unconstitutional conditions of confinement.²

² It is not clear whether Plaintiff is a convicted and sentenced prisoner or a pre-trial detainee. Pretrial detainees (and convicted but unsentenced prisoners) are protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment; convicted and sentenced prisoners are protected by the Eighth Amendment. See Bell v. Wolfish, 441 U.S. 520, 535, n.16, 545 (1979); City of Revere v. Massachusetts General Hospital, 463 U.S. 239, 244 (1983); Hubbard v. Taylor, 399 F.3d 150 (3d Cir. 2005); Natale v. Camden County Correctional Facility, 318 F.3d 575, 581 (3d Cir. 2003); Fuentes v. Wagner, 206 F.3d 335, 341 n.9 (3d Cir. 2000); Monmouth County Correctional Institutional Inmates v. Lanzaro, 834 F.2d 326, 346 n.31 (3d Cir. 1987), cert. denied, 486 U.S. 1006 (1988).

Plaintiff names as the sole defendant the Hudson County Correctional Center. He seeks damages in the amount of \$50,000.

II. STANDARDS FOR A SUA SPONTE DISMISSAL

This Court must dismiss, at the earliest practicable time, certain in forma pauperis and prisoner actions that are frivolous, malicious, fail to state a claim, or seek monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2) (in forma pauperis actions); 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (actions in which prisoner seeks redress from a governmental defendant); 42 U.S.C. § 1997e (prisoner actions brought with respect to prison conditions).

In determining the sufficiency of a pro se complaint, the Court must be mindful to construe it liberally in favor of the plaintiff. Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520-21 (1972); United States v. Day, 969 F.2d 39, 42 (3d Cir. 1992). The Court must "accept as true all of the allegations in the complaint and all reasonable inferences that can be drawn therefrom, and view them in the light most favorable to the plaintiff." Morse v. Lower Merion School Dist., 132 F.3d 902, 906 (3d Cir. 1997).

A complaint must plead facts sufficient at least to "suggest" a basis for liability. Spruill v. Gillis, 372 F.3d 218, 236 n.12 (3d Cir. 2004). "Specific facts are not necessary; the statement need only 'give the defendant fair notice of what

the ... claim is and the grounds upon which it rests.'" Erickson v. Pardus, 127 S.Ct. 2197, 2200 (2007) (citations omitted).

While a complaint ... does not need detailed factual allegations, a plaintiff's obligation to provide the "grounds" of his "entitle[ment] to relief" requires more than labels and conclusions, and a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not do, see Papasan v. Allain, 478 U.S. 265, 286, 106 S.Ct. 2932, 92 L.Ed.2d 209 (1986) (on a motion to dismiss, courts "are not bound to accept as true a legal conclusion couched as a factual allegation").

Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 127 S.Ct. 1955, 1964-65 (2007) (citations omitted). See also Morse v. Lower Merion School Dist., 132 F.3d at 906 (a court need not credit a pro se plaintiff's "bald assertions" or "legal conclusions").

A pro se complaint may be dismissed for failure to state a claim only if it appears "'beyond doubt that the plaintiff can prove no set of facts in support of his claim which would entitle him to relief.'" Haines, 404 U.S. at 521 (quoting Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41, 45-46 (1957)); Milhouse v. Carlson, 652 F.2d 371, 373 (3d Cir. 1981). Where a complaint can be remedied by an amendment, a district court may not dismiss the complaint with prejudice, but must permit the amendment. Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 34 (1992); Grayson v. Mayview State Hospital, 293 F.3d 103, 108 (3d Cir. 2002) (dismissal pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)); Shane v. Fauver, 213 F.3d 113, 116-17 (3d Cir. 2000) (dismissal pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c)(1)); Urrutia v. Harrisburg County Police Dept., 91 F.3d 451, 453 (3d Cir. 1996).

III. SECTION 1983 ACTIONS

A plaintiff may have a cause of action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for certain violations of his constitutional rights. Section 1983 provides in relevant part:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory ... subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress

Thus, to state a claim for relief under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege, first, the violation of a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States and, second, that the alleged deprivation was committed or caused by a person acting under color of state law. West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); Piecknick v. Pennsylvania, 36 F.3d 1250, 1255-56 (3d Cir. 1994).

IV. ANALYSIS

Here, Plaintiff has failed to name a state actor as a defendant. The only named defendant is Hudson County Correctional Center. A county jail, however, is not a "person" amenable to suit under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. See, e.g., Marbry v. Correctional Medical Services, 238 F.3d 422, *2 (6th Cir. 2000) (unpubl.); Ogden v. Huntingdon Co., 2007 WL 2343814, *3 (M.D. Pa. Aug. 15, 2007); Marsden v. Federal BOP, 856 F.Supp. 832, 836

(S.D.N.Y. 1994); Powell v. Cook County Jail, 814 F.Supp. 757, 758 (N.D. Ill. 1993); McCoy v. Chesapeake Correctional Center, 788 F.Supp. 890, 893-94 (E.D. Va. 1992). Accordingly, the Complaint must be dismissed.

Moreover, the Complaint fails to state a claim under either the Eighth or Fourteenth Amendments.³

Pre-trial detainees and convicted but unsentenced prisoners retain liberty interests firmly grounded in the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. See Hubbard v. Taylor, 399 F.3d 150 (3d Cir. 2005); Fuentes v. Wagner, 206 F.3d 335, 341 (3d Cir. 2000). Analysis of whether such a detainee or unsentenced prisoner has been deprived of liberty without due process is governed by the standards set out by the Supreme Court in Bell v. Wolfish, 441 U.S. 520 (1979). Hubbard, 399 F.3d at 157-60, 164-67; Fuentes, 206 F.3d at 341-42.

In evaluating the constitutionality of conditions or restrictions of pretrial detention that implicate only the protection against deprivation of liberty without due process of law, we think that the proper inquiry is whether those conditions amount to punishment of the detainee. For under the Due Process Clause, a detainee may not be punished prior to an adjudication of guilt in accordance with due process of law. ...

Not every disability imposed during pretrial detention amounts to "punishment" in the constitutional sense, however. Once the government has exercised its

³ As noted above, Plaintiff does not state whether he is a pre-trial detainee, a convicted but unsentenced prisoner, or a sentenced prisoner.

conceded authority to detain a person pending trial, it obviously is entitled to employ devices that are calculated to effectuate this detention. ...

A court must decide whether the disability is imposed for the purpose of punishment or whether it is but an incident of some other legitimate governmental purpose. Absent a showing of an expressed intent to punish on the part of detention facility officials, that determination generally will turn on "whether an alternative purpose to which [the restriction] may rationally be connected is assignable for it, and whether it appears excessive in relation to the alternative purpose assigned [to it]." Thus, if a particular condition or restriction of pretrial detention is reasonably related to a legitimate governmental objective, it does not, without more, amount to "punishment." Conversely, if a restriction or condition is not reasonably related to a legitimate goal--if it is arbitrary or purposeless--a court permissibly may infer that the purpose of the governmental action is punishment that may not constitutionally be inflicted upon detainees qua detainees. ...

441 U.S. at 535-39 (citations omitted). The Court further explained that the government has legitimate interests that stem from its need to maintain security and order at the detention facility. "Restraints that are reasonably related to the institution's interest in maintaining jail security do not, without more, constitute unconstitutional punishment, even if they are discomforting and are restrictions that the detainee would not have experienced had he been released while awaiting trial." 441 U.S. at 540. Retribution and deterrence, however, are not legitimate nonpunitive governmental objectives. 441 U.S. at 539 n.20. Nor are grossly exaggerated responses to genuine security considerations. Id. at 539 n.20, 561-62.

The Eighth Amendment to the United States Constitution, applicable to the individual states through the Fourteenth Amendment, prohibits the states from inflicting "cruel and unusual punishments" on those convicted of crimes. Rhodes v. Chapman, 452 U.S. 337, 344-46 (1981). This proscription against cruel and unusual punishments is violated by the "unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain contrary to contemporary standards of decency." Helling v. McKinney, 509 U.S. 25, 32 (1993). It is well settled that "the treatment a prisoner receives in prison and the conditions under which he is confined are subject to scrutiny under the Eighth Amendment." Id. at 31.

To state a claim under the Eighth Amendment, an inmate must allege both an objective and a subjective component. Wilson v. Seiter, 501 U.S. 294, 298 (1991). The objective component mandates that "only those deprivations denying 'the minimal civilized measure of life's necessities' ... are sufficiently grave to form the basis of an Eighth Amendment violation." Helling v. McKinney, 509 U.S. at 32 (quoting Rhodes, 452 U.S. at 346). This component requires that the deprivation sustained by a prisoner be sufficiently serious, for only "extreme deprivations" are sufficient to make out an Eighth Amendment claim. Hudson v. McMillian, 503 U.S. 1, 9 (1992).

The subjective component requires that the state actor have acted with "deliberate indifference," a state of mind equivalent

to a reckless disregard of a known risk of harm. See Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 835 (1994); Wilson, 501 U.S. at 303.

A plaintiff may satisfy the objective component of an Eighth Amendment conditions-of-confinement claim if he can show that the conditions alleged, either alone or in combination, deprive him of "the minimal civilized measure of life's necessities," such as adequate food, clothing, shelter, sanitation, medical care, and personal safety. Rhodes, 452 U.S. at 347-48; Young v. Quinlan, 960 F.2d 351, 364 (3d Cir. 1992). However, while the Eighth Amendment directs that convicted prisoners not be subjected to cruel and unusual punishment, "the Constitution does not mandate comfortable prisons." Rhodes, 452 U.S. at 349. To the extent that certain conditions are only "restrictive" or "harsh," they are merely part of the penalty that criminal offenders pay for their offenses against society. Id. at 347. An inmate may fulfill the subjective element of such a claim by demonstrating that prison officials knew of such substandard conditions and "acted or failed to act with deliberate indifference to a substantial risk of harm to inmate health or safety." Ingalls v. Florio, 968 F.Supp. 193, 198 (D.N.J. 1997).

Under either standard, Plaintiff's allegations of double-celling and provision of clean sheets only every month or two fail to state a claim. Overcrowding in a prison setting is not itself a violation of the Constitution. See Rhodes v. Chapman,

452 U.S. at 347-48 (double-celling is not per se cruel and unusual punishment). See also Bell v. Wolfish, 441 U.S. 520 (double-celling pre-trial detainees for short periods does not constitute punishment under Due Process Clause). Overcrowding may constitute cruel and unusual punishment when it leads "to deprivations of essential food, medical care, or sanitation," or when it causes an "increase [in] violence among inmates or create[s] other conditions intolerable for prison confinement." See Rhodes, 452 U.S. at 348; Nami v. Fauver, 82 F.3d 63, 66-67 (3d Cir. 1996); Tillery v. Owens, 907 F.2d 418 (3d Cir. 1990).

Here, Plaintiff has not alleged any facts suggesting that the double-celling has caused him any deprivation or created any intolerable condition. Nor has Plaintiff alleged any facts suggesting that the defendants acted for the purpose of punishment or with deliberate indifference. Thus, the mere allegation of double-celling and infrequent changes of sheets are not sufficient to state a claim of constitutional deprivation. See, e.g., Halliburton v. Sunquist, 59 Fed.Appx. 781, 2003 WL 1194247 (6th Cir. 2003); Stevenson v. Whetsel, 52 Fed.Appx. 444, 2002 WL 31693490 (10th Cir. 2002).

V. CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, the Complaint must be dismissed, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and

1915A(b)(1) and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e, for failure to state a claim.⁴ However, because it is conceivable that Plaintiff may be able to supplement his pleading with facts sufficient to state a claim, the Court will grant Plaintiff leave to move to re-open accompanied by a proposed amended complaint.⁵ An appropriate order follows.

/s/ Faith S. Hochberg
United States District Judge

Dated: February 20, 2008

⁴ The Court notes that "[g]enerally, an order which dismisses a complaint without prejudice is neither final nor appealable because the deficiency may be corrected by the plaintiff without affecting the cause of action.' ... The dispositive inquiry is whether the district court's order finally resolved the case." Martin v. Brown, 63 F.3d 1252, 1257-58 (3d Cir. 1995) (quoting Borelli v. City of Reading, 532 F.2d 950, 951 (3d Cir. 1976)) (other citations omitted). In this case, if Plaintiff can correct the deficiencies of his Complaint, he may file a motion to re-open these claims in accordance with the court rules.

⁵ Plaintiff should note that when an amended complaint is filed, the original complaint no longer performs any function in the case and "cannot be utilized to cure defects in the amended [complaint], unless the relevant portion is specifically incorporated in the new [complaint]." 6 Wright, Miller & Kane, Federal Practice and Procedure § 1476 (2d ed. 1990) (footnotes omitted). An amended complaint may adopt some or all of the allegations in the original complaint, but the identification of the particular allegations to be adopted must be clear and explicit. Id. To avoid confusion, the safer course is to file an amended complaint that is complete in itself. Id.